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AUTHOR Ritter, Donald E.
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ABSTRACT

This paper examines motivation in elementary and secondary schools and discusses its relationship to critical and creative thinking, student decisionmaking, future trends, and mass media. It is suggested that thinking is an important consideration in teaching students and that there is a relationship between student thinking and motivation. Self-esteem and a feeling of self-worth were found to play an important role in student motivation. In order to protect self-esteem the individual often displays corresponding low-effort behaviors, but it was learned that interventions can be designed to impact on students' motivations. The literature revealed that imposed learning results in passive learners, a characteristic that is considered undesirable. It was also found that in order for critical and creative thinking to impact positively on the motivation of learners, they should be allowed to pursue their own self-interest in school. Technology was also found to have a positive impact on student motivation. However, the use of technology also results in some difficulty relative to teaching critical and creative thinking skills. The impact of a futures related curricula is discussed as well as the relationship of public school curriculum content, critical and creative thinking, and motivation. (Author)

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Curriculum Content Today and Tomorrow; Will Students be Motivated to Learn?

Donald E. Ritter

Western Kentucky University

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Introduction

Teachers frequently express concerns related to motivation. It may be that students who are not motivated are among those who fail to recognize that the acquisition of knowledge and skills in school can result in something meaningful for them. As a consequence, today's teachers seem to have more difficulty motivating their students than at any other period in the history of schools. How can this be changed? What will tomorrow's teachers have to do to improve the situation?

In an effort to find solutions to this problem, an ERIC Data Based computer search was made of related literature published since 1980. The key indicators included: motivation, elementary and secondary education, critical and creative thinking, thinking involved in decision-making, educational change, trends and the futures-of-society, and mass media effects. Most of the findings were derived from the literature located in the search.

This paper presents the results of that effort. It examines motivation and other curricular variables that are

germaine to motivation. It is suggested that thinking is an important consideration in teaching students, and the relationship of thinking to motivation is scrutinized. The role of technology and how it might affect instruction is discussed. Also to be presented will be curriculum content related to these issues that was found in the literature resulting from the computer search. The results are not presented as being conclusive. It is not felt, for example, that we are limited to the social studies and language arts as the subjects that will serve us best in motivating students although these are the only subjects discussed in this paper. Perhaps the findings will give us some insight into ways to teach in tomorrow's schools that will provide for productive learning for tomorrow's students.

The Findings

Motivation. Through the efforts of Ames and Ames (1984) to disseminate recent research, we learn that motivation is a function of one's thoughts (p. 1). It has been found that students expend significant efforts to protect their self-concept (p. 5). Children who may have less ability than others can put forth more effort and seem

to have high ability. At the same time they will not put forth such effort if they think they will fail, because to do so will make them appear to have less ability even when this is not the case (1984, p. 5). Thus, in an effort to protect one's self-esteem and self-worth, the individual often displays correspondening low-effort behaviors (p. 8).

Further, it is learned that interventions can be designed to impact on students' motivations (1984, p. 9). Care must be taken in deciding what intervention strategies to utilize. Related to what is known about those things that characterize motivation, it is learned that commonly used educational practices such as testing and the use of rewards can actually have debilitating effects on motivation (p. 10).

Through control theory, Glasser (1986) seems to support the research on motivation. He takes a position in opposition to stimulus-response theory, and expresses the belief that none of us does anything because someone tells us to (p. 7). In fact, he contends, students do what they do when it is seen as being satisfying to them (p. 8). He suggests that if we want to get students to do work

necessary to learn, they must feel there is a payoff for them if they are going to work harder in school (p. 9).

Thinking. A survey of the literature utilized for this study reveals support for critical and creative thinking in American educational programs. At least 12 of these sources promote the need for teaching students to think. The 12 sources include: Butts (1980); Cuban (1984); Finkelstein (1985); Kearney (1986); Le Mahieu (1981); Moses (1985); National Assessment of Educational Progress (1985); Powell (1981); Presseisen (1986); Shanker (1985); Thaiss (1984); and Theobald (1984).

There appears to be a consistent theme throughout the literature. It involves a criticism of imposed learning resulting in passive learners, a characteristic that is felt to be most undesirable (Thaiss, 1984, p. 122). There seems to be no doubt of the need for developing imaginative, creative thinkers who would be effective in elaborating ideas and drawing understandings from what they read (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1985, p. 10).

The importance of critical and creative thinking to motivation is suggested by Moses (1985, p. 114). By accepting this idea, it can be concluded that the learner should be allowed to learn by pursuing his/her own self interests. In educational programs that promote this pursuit, excellence would result. It is suggested that this can be so only if students achieve thinking skills. The literature that discusses how to teach thinking, tends to support teaching thinking in all subjects rather than as a separate subject (Shanker, 1985; Kearney, 1986). Teachers themselves must be creative thinkers if they expect to teach their students to be creative thinkers (Powell, 1981, p. 166). Le Mahieu (1981) supports the need to avoid techniques that promote conformity and self-discouragement while urging the use of encouragement which cultivates ideas (p. 276).

Thaiss (1984) reminds us of the negative consequences of the use of mastery learning packets that are seen as "teacher proof" (p. 101), and cites Bloom's reminder that "mastery works best in subject areas that can be 'chopped up' into neat sequences" (p. 100). To be able to play an

active role in learning is more exciting than it is to experience learning in which we are just passive custodians (p. 122).

Technology. Explicit treatment of technology as it might pertain to motivation can be found in three of the references examined for this study. These references include: National Assessment of Educational Progress (1985); Thaiss (1984); and Thompson (1983).

To disregard the impact of computers, television and other technology would appear unrealistic, and to do so is not advocated in the literature. However, the difficulties involved in developing thinking skills and, thus, motivation can be clearly seen. For example, it is verified that children spend a great deal of time watching television -- as much as six or more hours a day (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1985, p. 9). It is suggested that this probably cannot be radically altered, but such habits are seen as being strongly related to lower reading proficiency (p 9).

In spite of the advantages some may see for the computer in the classroom, not all exhibit a completely

positive attitude. Thompson (1983) suggests that the computer should be unplugged and that children should start reading books (p. 14). It is emphasized that motivation, contemplation, thinking, and reasoning were developed before computers were utilized. He further suggests that it is too early to know if computers are instrumental in teaching students to think, reminding us that teachers -- and there were teachers before there were computers -- often wonder if they have made a difference (1983, p. 16).

Thaiss (1984) points out that while there is a problem with individualized learning packets including computer courseware, we have to recognize that they are another fact of life. Children voluntarily spend as much as 28 hours a week with electronic media and they are assigned print materials by schools that involve them for another 25 hours a week (p. 219). The point is made that outside the classroom "new technologies are changing how children give and receive information" (p. 219). Children become attuned to visual signals on television as well as changes that are announced through various types of music. Therefore, words become secondary to the visual image on the screen (p. 119).

Regardless of the concerns that may be held related to the impact of technology on our youth, it is not seen as negative by everyone. Thaiss (1984) suggests that research tends to disprove two popular myths concerning the computer. One myth is that computer based instruction is dehumanizing. The other myth is that the high acceptance of computer based instruction is due to the novelty of the experience (p. 219). Despite any possible negative opinion regarding the effectiveness of the computer, television, and other technology in classroom instruction, it would seem that they are having a positive impact on learning. And this impact would appear to go beyond the fact that they may be seen by the school staff as being motivational only.

The Future. As might be expected, several of the sources utilized for this study dealt with the future. There were seven of them, and they included: Bauer (1981); Haas (1980); Hartoonian (1982); Isham (1985); Powell (1981); Raywid (1980); and Ritter (1986).

The difficulty of predicting the future exists for a number of apparent reasons. Interventions occur that cannot be predicted, cause-and-effect relationships may be mis-

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interpreted, the prediction may have been based on unreliable information or pertinent data, and other similar types of characteristics may alter the forecasts we make for the future (Haas, 1980, p. 80). In research done by this writer concerning teacher preparation programs of the future, it was generalized that the predictions that were made were based, in large part, on changes that were already impacting teacher preparation programs in the United States (Ritter, 1986).

A subject area proposed for dealing with a futures related curriculum was the social studies. Butts (1980) suggests that the principal purpose of schools is that of educating learners for citizenship (p. 75). In addition, he points out the importance of the interdependence of content and of critical thinking (p. 84). Bauer (1981) felt that as enrichment, we should project information about places and people -- past and present -- into the future (p. 156). Isham (1985) reminds us that since the 1930s the social studies have been used to try to help students respond intelligently to the social, economic, and political problems of the future (p. 571). Haas (1980) suggests that

to know our future as much as to know our past, is to know ourselves (p. 9). Hartoonian (1982) believes that social studies can best prepare enlightened citizens for the 21st century (Abstract, no page number). The social studies, then, would seem to be an important area of the curriculum in which to deal with the motivation needs of students of the future.

Regarding the self-esteem needs of students, the literature is not silent. Hartoonian (1982) feels that practical skills, intellectual abilities, and ethical competencies should all play a role in the curriculum (p. 13). He makes a clear case for the improvement of self. "To be educated is the ability to work on self in a never ending struggle to be better...not better off...<u>better</u>!" (p. 12). Raywid (1980) adds that we cannot put all students through the same hoop and that we must take more seriously the idea of "differentiated educations" (p. 13).

Powell (1981) proposes that educators need to begin reshaping what she calls "the educational factory" into "the educational resource center" (p. 165). She contends that because of a rapid rate of growth globally, we must look

forward to the basics of logical thinking, reasoning, decision making, problem solving, critical thinking, and communications (p. 165). Assuming that Powell is correct concerning global growth, we should be concerned by the indication that teacher preparation programs of the future may place relatively little emphasis on international education (Ritter, 1986, p. 11).

Discussion

In this section of the paper the issues will be discussed from the writer's perspective. It is based, largely, on the observations of public school classrooms and on interaction with public school teachers in university graduate classes and in public school settings.

Teachers prefer to teach motivated children. Further, most teachers desire students to be motivated by the realization that the acquisition of knowledge and skills are important to them and will assist them to improve their lives. A survey of the current educational scene would seem to indicate that such is frequently not the case.

What does bring needs satisfaction to the learner resulting in the learner being motivated? It is felt that

the answer is somehow related to the idea of the learner being actively involved and having ownership in the learning process. When the learner experiences a personal sense of accomplishment that comes with a real feeling of success, she/he develops the perception of being an important part of the classroom and of the group of people who are in it.

Although the importance of the establishment of competencies for learners is not denied, it would seem that the movement to do so has failed to be a motivating factor for many students. Establishing minimum competency levels has led teachers to stress teaching strategies that often place students in lower order thinking activities and has tended to cause teachers to avoid establishing maximum competency levels. Emphasis on minimum competency levels often seems to preclude efforts to include higher order thinking in the curriculum. In addition, the fact that teachers have been required to test the achievement of learner competencies has placed undue emphasis on testing for the achievement of basic skills. This, of course, has caused undue emphasis on lower order thinking.

Another problem that is seen is the dependence by teachers on published material as a basic curriculum source. This is not to be interpreted to mean that published materials should be avoided. But it should be seen as a statement of a position that says: effective teachers can creatively implement teaching strategies that would help students learn to solve problems and to develop thinking skills. Guides for the teacher to follow are always helpful and appreciated, but to feel dependent on published materials that systematically sequence thinking skills, inquiry, and problem solving activities can often be counterproductive. Teachers have been heard to comment in frustration concerning instructional situations in which children appear to learn during instruction, using workbooks and other printed materials, but when they leave those materials and the instructional setting, there seems to be no transfer of the ability to use those skills in other circumstances.

If these concerns about the reliance of teachers on published materials are well placed, Apple's (1983) prediction for the future should be disturbing. If he is

correct, the continued influence of business on education to produce citizens with the basic skills could result in a failure to produce citizens who are adequately enlightened and involved in a democracy such as the one originally conceived for the United States. He suggests that we are "witnessing the emergence of industry as a powerful pressure that seeks to influence education," and he predicts a "growing cooperation between state departments of education and the business community" (1983, p. 322). He points out that businesses have departments whose goals are to distribute curricular materials to schools. And with these and other tendencies for the curriculum to be controlled by publishers, "what we have actually seen is the *deskilling* of our teaching force (p. 323).

Closely related to the dependence on published and printed materials and to the emphasis on minimum competencies is the tendency to require students to work on the "correct" level. If children are forced to work at levels established by publishers as appropriate for their age, many children will be either bored or frustrated, because the level is, in fact, often inappropriate for them. This

appears to result in unmotivated students who experience a dislike for school. Random comments by teachers in the early elementary grades have led this writer to believe that because of those practices, a dislike of school frequently occurs as early as the second and third grade levels.

The impact of technology on today's children cannot be denied nor can it be expected to go away. The literature makes it clear that television alone seems to be affecting and altering the way children now receive and process information. It certainly does not appear that this impact will be lessened in the 21st century.

No attempt has been made to indicate the way to use technology such as computers and calculators in teaching skills and concepts so that they are internalized by the learner. The teachers with whom this writer has discussed this issue have taken various positions. Regardless of whether they feel that mathematics and language skills should be taught before the learner uses the computer and calculator or whether they feel the computer and calculator should be utilized to teach these skills, they all seem to

support the notion that computers and calculators are motivating tools for students when used in the instructional process.

Concerning the impact of technology on today's children outside the school, there seems to be little doubt that they find it entertaining and motivating. Additionally, there appears to be a tendency for those who are entertained by technology such as television to be mentally passive rather than active recipients of information. One is tempted to believe that little critical thinking is involved. Also, teachers seem to find themselves at a disadvantage in trying to motivate students, because the teachers have not determined how to make learning as entertaining as the technological media the students have been experiencing outside of school.

Conclusions

What should education hold for the public school student of the future? For what is that student being prepared? This paper has attempted to answer these and other questions. There has been an effort to determine from the findings how the curriculum of the 21st century may be

affected by what is known about motivation. To create learning environments in which students feel free to think and to think critically would appear to be important.

The motivated student, we can conclude, is one who believes learning is personally important, and who feels that learning in school positively affects his/her self-concept. Being educated in a democracy should mean that one is prepared to be a citizen of that democracy. To be a productive citizen would require the skill to analyze issues that are a part of her/his existence. Therefore, the curriculum content of the school of tomorrow should be consistent with achieving these goals.

The ability to think appears to be closely associated with motivation. In a curriculum implemented so that students can think and explore freely without being made to feel that what they produce must have no errors, the self-concept of those students should be enhanced. When such is the case, motivation for those learners should be increased. Surely it would not be considered inaccurate to suggest, as Moses (1986, p. 117) and Presseisen (1986, p. 1)

do, that the goals and purposes of schools are related thinking.

It could be supposed that the literature surveyed implies that a number of subjects are not important for providing content for the school of the future. The writer does not feel that such is the case, and it is felt that to take such a position would be to grossly misrepresent the views of the writers of that literature. However, it has been seen that to achieve the appropriate purposes set forth for the school, the language arts and social studies could serve as important basic content areas in the curriculum.

Concerning technology, it seems accurate to state that it is here to stay. Technology should continue to profoundly impact children's lives. Even though computers, television, calculators, and other technological devices have probably been used incorrectly on occasion, the technology can be used appropriately and constructively to teach content in the school of the future. Problem solving and other productive strategies to encourage thinking, can be implemented through technology. Since there is little, if any, doubt that children will continue to immerse

themselves in activities utilizing technological aids, it seems fair to assume that the school of the future will need to avoid resisting their use and get on with determining how they can appropriately be utilized to enhance student learning.

A democracy depends on a citizenry that can and will think critically and make decisions about issues that are before them at any given time. To fail to do so is tantamount to the demise of democracy. Public schools are provided, in large part, to perpetuate a democracy. It would seem logical to assume that if such is going to continue to be the case, those schools should teach content so that students can in fact become motivated, participating, thinking members of that democracy.

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